

## **Drugs/alcohol on the rise**

### **Superintendent, DHS principal voice concern within schools**

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This year's Duxbury High School Senior Night Out event, held on a cruise ship in Boston, was plagued by the fact that several members of the senior class were caught under the influence of drugs and alcohol. Prescription drugs and alcohol were smuggled on board despite two separate searches being conducted prior to the attendees entering the vessel. Widespread rumors of cocaine and MDMA (Molly) possession emerged as students recounted their stories to school and law enforcement officials upon their return to campus.

This incident prompted DHS Principal Andrew Stephens to formally address the senior class in addition to releasing an email for parents detailing the substance abuse issue the high school is currently facing.

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In his email, Stephens states that, "my purpose in addressing this to all DHS parents is that, in my opinion, this incident reflects larger issues occurring within our town and our school across all grade levels. Specifically, the concerns are with drugs and alcohol."

"My main point is to inform the community. I felt that I needed to discuss the concern that we have here," said Stephens, in regards to his email. "And that's based on the level of care that we have for the kids as individuals and as a group." "This incident at Senior Night Out brought these issues out in the open," he continued. "We all want to avoid a tragedy." Stephens goes on to state in his email that, "this year we have experienced a marked increase in the number of students who have been found to be under the influence or in possession of drugs and/or alcohol."

"I'm comfortable saying that this year the drug use among students has definitely increased in its frequency," said Stephens, who has served in his role at DHS for nine years. "We're seeing this issue at a much higher frequency than we've seen before and that we're comfortable with."

This is an opinion shared with DHS staff members possessing a longer tenure at the school than its principal.

In a follow-up of Stephens' note to parents of high school students, Duxbury's superintendent of schools, Dr. Ben Tantilto, released a statement of his own on Friday, April 15 in which he addressed the entire Duxbury public school district. Tantilto, superintendent of schools since 2010, has also noticed an uptick of drug and alcohol abuse among students during his tenure. He echoed Stephens' sentiments in his own piece stating, "like so many high schools across the country, and particularly on the South Shore, students are increasingly making dangerous choices. This is a pattern of behavior that we've seen with greater frequency over the past several years – and one that is causing a heightened concern about the well being of our students."

Tantillo adds, “our latest senior night boat cruise had incidents of substance abuse not seen since 2007.”

In his email, Stephens noted that alcohol, marijuana and Alprazolam (brand name Xanax, used to treat panic disorders and anxiety disorders) are the primary substances that students have been using and abusing at an escalated rate.

Stephens stated that DHS staff members are also seeing this issue in regards to some of the school’s “most involved students.”

“Sometimes the assumption is the fact that the kids who are experiencing drugs and alcohol abuse are the ‘uninvolved kids,’” he said. “This problem is not just limited to the kids who are outliers.”

In his statement to parents, Stephens also makes light of the fact that, “[drug/alcohol abuse] is an issue throughout the South Shore that is present in Duxbury with regard to off-campus activities, and more alarmingly, on-campus and/or at school events. Of utmost concern is the higher incidence of issues (possession and being under the influence of drugs/alcohol) that are actually occurring in school.”

At this time the school isn’t prepared to disclose statistics detailing the number of incidents that the school has dealt with regarding students being under the influence or in possession of drugs and alcohol due to the fact that the current school year is not over yet.

Superintendent Tantillo and school resource officer Friend Weiler were not available for comment as of press time.